

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
CONGRESSMAN TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



NEWS RELEASE

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Davis Probes D.C.'s Cancer Screening Programs

Letter Questions Effectiveness of Implementation

Washington, D.C. - House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) wrote today to Robert C. Bobb, City Administrator for the District of Columbia, to express his concerns and seek information related to the ineffective management over three federally funded cancer screening and prevention programs for its poor citizens.

In one instance, the D.C. Department of Health failed to spend a \$1 million grant for one of the screening programs, Project WISH (Women Into Staying Healthy), resulting in a six-month suspension of its operations for needy women. Members of the D.C. Cancer Coalition have criticized the Department of Health for not providing the necessary leadership and staff to fulfill the conditions of the federal grant.

"If the city is unable to administer these vital federal programs, the District is putting the health of its citizens at serious risk. The District has the unfortunate distinction of having the highest overall cancer mortality rate in the country, and it is unacceptable if someone is unable to be diagnosed with cancer in its early stages because of bureaucratic ineptness," said Chairman Davis.

A copy of the letter follows:

June 28, 2004

Mr. Robert C. Bobb
City Administrator
District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mr. Bobb:

Recent press reports have highlighted difficulties that the District of Columbia has been having in effectively implementing three federally funded cancer screening and prevention programs for its indigent citizens. Since the District has the highest overall cancer mortality rates in the nation and the highest breast cancer death rate, this situation is particularly alarming. I am concerned that the District government's inability to administer these vital federal programs is seriously jeopardizing the health and welfare of the District's citizens.

The District of Columbia has received a \$1.46 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) this fiscal year for several cancer prevention programs. One is Project WISH, which funds cancer screening for indigent women. Another funds an initiative to develop and implement a comprehensive cancer control plan for the District that involves a committee of cancer experts. In a June 9, 2004 letter to Herbert R. Tillery, Acting Director of the District of Columbia Department of Health, Dr. Jeanne Mandelblatt and Dr. Donald Henson, Co-Chairs of the District of Columbia Cancer Coalition, stated that funding for Project WISH had been delayed, that screening under the program was suspended for six months, and that a portion of the funds are in jeopardy of being lost. Drs. Mandelblatt and Henson expressed concern that the Department of Health had not provided the necessary leadership and staff to fulfill the conditions of the CDC grant. Despite these shortcomings, the District of Columbia Cancer Coalition has begun an entirely volunteer effort to develop a cancer plan for the District.

Press reports indicated different reasons for the suspension of Health Department activity with the cancer screening programs. They ranged from failure of the D.C. Council to release funds to bureaucratic incompetency and personnel problems at the Health Department. Also, reports have stated that steps are being taken by your office and Acting Health Department Director Tillery to reinstitute the program and protect the CDC funding.

Nevertheless, I remain deeply concerned about this situation and intend to make certain that all steps are being taken to fully implement cancer screening programs in the District of Columbia. Therefore, I request that you provide answers to the following questions:

1. Why did the Project WISH screening program cease for several months? What were the specific problems that caused this hiatus?
2. Why did the Health Department not actively support and facilitate the development and implementation of a comprehensive cancer control plan? What were the specific problems that caused this lack of support?
3. What steps are being taken by the Health Department to cooperate and obtain the full benefits from the District of Columbia Cancer Coalition?

4. Please provide a list of each of the CDC funded programs for cancer prevention for which the District of Columbia receives funding, the amount of funding for each program, and the amount that has been expended and for what specific purpose for each such program during the current fiscal year.
5. What steps are the City Administrator's Office and the Health Department taking to assure that the CDC funded cancer prevention programs continue uninterrupted and that funding is not lost?
6. In addition to the CDC funded programs, what else is the Health Department doing to combat the high cancer rate in the District?
7. Specifically with regard to Project WISH, it has been reported that the District is stationing outreach workers in public places to recruit low-income women for cancer screening. Why did you decide on this particular approach? What other activities are contemplated? Do you intend to consult with and engage the Cancer Coalition in planning such activities?

It has been reported that the Health Department is conducting an inventory of the grants it receives and will track expenditures and evaluate whether the funds are used appropriately. Please provide a copy of this inventory when it is completed.

Sincerely,

Tom Davis
Chairman

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